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Doc. No. 5832

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Subject: Laha Battle in Ambon Island

I landed at Hitram before dawn on January 30, 1942 as a warrant officer leading a section of the second company. After landing, acting under the orders of superiors, accompanied by others in the section sought a guide, as we did not know the way to Laha. Accompanied by an old man and having ascertained our way we advanced towards Laha.

We arrived at Sowakodo that afternoon and after a short rest, we opened action. When we ceased action, we took up billets in Sowakodo.

We attacked several times without success, although suffering heavy casualties. While regretting over the loss of so many comrades, a shot fired from the enemy's trench mortar fell a coconut palm and a banana tree, and as I had no time to run away, I received a wound in the right shoulder. As it was my right arm, I retired to the rear for medical treatment in Sowakodo. Although I do not remember the exact date of the incident, but I believe it happened in the evening of February 1, 1942.

Laha was captured at dawn on February 3, 1942.

Since I was wounded, I did not participate in Laha battle, but remained with the rear unit.

The section under my command and others entered Laha on February 3, but I could not on account of my wound. Though I don't remember the exact date but I think it was in the evening of February 6 that I entered Laha, the ancient Tauri village, by a barve, and was billeted in a house, which was formerly used as a school. Unable to move freely on account of my wound, I did not go beyond the billeting area and thus could see only its neighborhood.

I first saw the allied prisoners at Sowakodo on my way to fetch meals at the army kitchen. At that time I did not know how these allied personnel come to be prisoners of the Japanese force. However about a month after that incident I discovered that they had surrendered.

The prisoners were detained in the school building at Sowakodo, which was situated on the other side of the temporary Japanese army kitchen. It was in the evening when I saw them and they were inside the cage.

Next time when I saw them, I believe it was in the morning of February 2 and there were about 3 or 9 escorted by Japanese soldiers.

On the same evening I saw another bunch of about ten also escorted by Japanese soldiers. As I was not able to take part in the night raid with others in the evening, I went to fetch my meal at the kitchen, when I saw some thirty allied prisoners again.

At dawn on February 3 we received the report of the capture of Laha. When I went to fetch my meal on the same morning I estimated there were something like 40 allied prisoners. But this is only a rough estimate, as I did not take the trouble to count them.

The temporary Sowakodo cages were divided into two sections, one smaller one for the officers and the larger for n.c.os and men. I got to know later that there were one Major, one medical captain and two or three others in captivity. I also saw the prisoners in the same cage on the 4th and 5th of February.

Though I don't know the exact date, after we had finished our noon meal on or about the 6th, Commander of the Company, NAKAGAWA, arrived at Sowakodo with a party of Japanese troops of about a platoon strong (40) in two barges. He announced the disposal of the Allied prisoners, according to the order of the Landing party, and arrangements were made forthwith and the first execution took place after about an hour. Though uncertain, the prisoners were executed in a forest near Laha, located some 350 metres from the cages. The weapons used for execution were mostly Japanese swords, but bayonets also were used. The method was that each prisoner had his hands tied behind his back and was taken to the place of the execution and made to sit down directly in front of the prepared position, his neck slightly stretched downwards, but not blindfolded, and in this way they were executed. I saw the executions up to the 27th or the 28th man, but because I didn't see the rest I don't know what had happened to the remainder.

The strength of the party which Company Commander NAKAGAWA brought over was divided into three parts, half of them was detailed for guard duty and about ten of them carried out the executions. The remainder over ten in number acted as escorts of prisoners. There were about 60 wounded men at Sowakodo at that time and I believe about 20, who could walk, had seen the executions. But because it happened four years ago I don't remember the names nor the faces of those who were present at the execution. I recollect only the signaller, YAMASHITA, by name but he was killed while in night operation in the middle of August 1943.

IKEMUCHI, who was the interpreter of the Company Commander, NAKAGAWA, seemed to question the prisoners on the spot. But as I stood some distance away as an observer and because I don't know English at all, I didn't understand what they were saying.

I don't remember the names and the faces of the executed allied prisoners because I had seen them for the first time in my life. I don't remember clearly the number of those who were executed, but I believe they were 10. And I don't also remember the names and the faces of the executioners. However, if I see them again, I may be able to recognize them. Although I am not certain, but men who carried out the executions were mostly those of YOSHIKAWA Platoon, reinforcements from the 1st SASAKI Special Landing Party, and partly some of them might have been those from the air base. Because the platoon commander, YOSHIKAWA, was killed in action, the senior warrant officer of the company took command of this platoon. I don't know whether the senior warrant officer of the platoon directly carried out the executions or not, but it is certain that he was present on the spot.

The reason why the YOSHIKAWA platoon had been attached to the Kure 1st Special Landing Party, was as follows. The latter had captured Legaspi (in the Philippines) prior to taking Albon, and in the transfer, left the 3rd platoon of the 2nd company and half of the infantry, artillery behind and so in this way the strength of the company became diminished; thus it became necessary to reinforce.

I don't know the exact reason why the execution was entrusted to the hands of the YOSHIKAWA Shotai, but according to the rumor circulated later on, the YOSHIKAWA Shotai, which was the reinforcement from the 1st Saseho Special Landing Party had lost not only its commander but relatively suffered heavy casualties and was seeking revenge; thus they volunteered themselves to the task.

About ten days after the capture of Laha, the platoon was quartered in Victoria Barracks for about one month, after which they were reincorporated in the Saseho 1st Special Landing Party (the Shiga party) which I believe had its base at Timor at that time, but I don't know where they are now. I think ten men out of this platoon were detailed as executioners and another ten as escorts, and the rest as guards. I can't say definitely because four years passed before now, but I can say it is a little certain.

Lt. NAKAGAWA, who had been sent according to the orders of the Landing party, was a responsible leader on the spot at Sowakodo. But as he was sent there by orders and acted under orders, he was not primarily responsible. The responsible man was Capt. KATAGIRIYAMA, who has given the orders, but the man who saw it carried out was Lt. NAKAGAWA.

One senior NCO took charge of the platoon on behalf of the commander after the death of YOSHIKAWA. But as I said before, it is certain that the senior NCO received orders from the Company Commander

and passed them on to his subordinates and saw them executed, but it is not certain whether he himself carried out the orders or not. Because he came to the platoon as one of the reinforcements, I didn't associate with him at all, and I don't remember his name nor face now after so many months.

Though I can't say definitely, but according to a rumor the guards of the prisoners were drawn from 93rd Seaplane Base Construction Unit and the Land Based Construction Unit. Though I don't remember accurately, but there were four or five shifts with two guards every time.

The reason why the Base Construction Unit took part in the battle was due to the fact that they had come to reinforce from the sea party on account of the 1st Kure Special Landing Party had been nearly wiped out by a series of heavy casualties. Men of the Base Construction Unit were non-combatants and mechanics. They were not armed and had to take arms from the dead and wounded of the 1st Kure Special Landing Party and do guard duty. And I remember there was a man seeming to be a lieutenant in charge of these units. I think he might have been the commander of the guards.

I remember the Base Construction Unit depart for some other area after the end of the battle, but a part of the land based Construction Detachment stayed in Laha for some two or three months. On account of the lapse of time I don't remember it clearly.

I know of nobody except the interpreter IKEUCHI who would be likely to know the names of the prisoners at Sowakodo.

Before and after receiving meals at the kitchen, not being able to speak in English, we tried to talk with the prisoners in Japanese or by signs. I remember they were such simple words such as Nippon, Japan, Fujiyama and Zentsuji, Shikoku.

Because I came in contact with the foreigners for the first time in my life and as I didn't know English, I don't remember how the prisoners look like, as all western people look alike to me.

If I remember right, among the Japanese troops in Sowakodo, the only person I remember is the interpreter FUKADA. But there may have been some others of the old 1st Special Landing Party, but I don't know.

I don't remember whether the interpreter, TAKADA, was present at the execution or not.

To the best of my recollection, their personal belongings were searched and they were subjected to physical examinations. This happened twice in front of the headquarters of the Landing Party at that time. The examiner was the chief warrant officer, SUWA, assisted by second warrant officer of the Wireless Platoon and another warrant officer. Though I don't remember their names, I may be able to recognize them if I see them again. His rank was a chief petty officer at that time.

They had confiscated a few of the prisoners' personal belongings after the examination. If my memory doesn't fail me, the prisoners' belongings consisted of money purses, mirrors of the field, tobacco, pocket books, fountain pens, and pencils, etc. A small quantity of cigarettes were given to the allied prisoners daily.

Although I am not certain, but I hear Warrant Officer SUWA left for Kei Islands when the 24th Base Construction Unit were transferred and later he went back to Japan after a turn at Sourabaya. The Warrant Officer, SUWA, didn't go to the front because he was the Commander of a Wireless Platoon, and he was extraordinarily a big fellow and his uniform was always an extra big one. I know him well.

I think it was about three or four o'clock on about the 6th of February 1942 when I left Sowakodo to Laha in barges. The executions were still going on at the time I departed. After I returned to Laha, Lt. NAKAGAWA came back with his party. It might have been about two hours after we entered Laha. Those who could walk and those who could be transferred among the wounded were brought back from Sokoeda to Laha in barges. Those who remained behind were nurses and wounded. I believe I remained in Laha on the 6th, 7th and the 8th. We left Laha for Victoria sometime after four on the 8th, when we saw 10 or more prisoners working on the jetty. I didn't see any other prisoners anywhere else. The reason is that because I have only been able to see in the neighbourhood of the barracks and could not go anywhere near the aerodrome because I have not yet entirely recovered.

Some 10 days after I was transferred to Victoria I learned for the first time that there were about 150 allied prisoners at the Laha aerodrome. About a month after my transfer to Victoria barracks, I entered the Ambon hospital from malaria. I remained in the hospital for about one and a half months. Sometime in the middle of March whilst in hospital, I heard that the prisoners captured in Laha had been disposed of. During the invasion of Ambon, the attacking Japanese force had encountered stronger resistance than it had expected and as the capture seemed to pass the scheduled date, the commander sent for naval and aerial

reinforcements by means of which he succeeded in capturing Laha. Though the numbers and the names of the warships are not clear, but the destroyers and minesweepers rushed into the bay and opened fire. In the course of action one minesweeper struck a mine and sank. Another minesweeper was lost, it is said, due to allied forces outside the bay. I actually saw the wreck of one, but heard only the story of the other. The survivors of two minesweepers were all accommodated in Victoria Barracks. Having had no reinforcements from Kure 1st Special Landing Party, they were put on guard Ambon under strength. They were rescued from the sea with hardly anything on and consequently they were given some old clothes to wear and captured allied arms. I was also told, although doubtful, that they were made to guard the Paso districts.

If I remember right, there were about 100 survivors from both minesweepers. The story that I had heard went on to say that the survivors regretted the loss of so many lives that they sought for revenge. As they couldn't give up this intention, the senior officer of the section made a request several times to Rear Admiral HATAKEYAMA Koichiro, the commander at that time. At first his request was turned down, but at last it was acquiesced and ordered Lt. HATAKEYAMA to carry out the plan who in turn conveyed the same to the aforesaid senior officer, and according to the rumor, the survivors carried out the executions between 15th-20th of February. The manner of executions was, it is said, both beheading and bayonetting. The place and time is not clear. I don't know the names and faces of the executioners because I didn't live with them. It was in the hospital that I heard the rumor about the executions.

Though I don't know the name of the magazine, I had read in some Japanese magazine that during the Laha battle about 18 allied personnel who had escaped out of the Ambon Island was found out by the little Japanese boat at Oranbai and was taken away to Laha. But I don't know the manner of their execution. Apart from the Sowakodo and Laha executions, I don't know of any other nor heard of any other.

All the above is the fact, but it is inevitable that there is a few mistakes in dates, because four years had elapsed. The fact is the fact to the end, and the rumor is the rumor to the end. I don't think there is anyone who knows the fact better than I among the 1st Kure Special Landing Party. I don't know whether there is anyone who knows anything about it or not. I have written all the facts I know and all the rumor I heard. I am sure there is not a single fact that I am ashamed of keeping it secret.

HAMANISHI Shigeo
Warrant Officer

Document No. 5332

I, SX.16852 Capt Kinnish Vivian PARISH of ARMY HEADQUARTERS,
MELBOURNE make oath and say:

1. I am an officer of the Australian Military
Forces and am an English-Japanese interpreter.

2. Annexed hereto and marked "A" is a true copy
of a statement in Japanese made by HAMANISHI Shigeo on 16th
November, 1945, which I have checked against the original held
by the Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees, Army HQ.

3. The original statement cannot be made avail-
able immediately as it is required for the trial of JAPANESE con-
cerned in the massacre of Australian PW at LAHA, AIBOINA.

Sworn before me at MELBOURNE)
this 6th day of June, 1946) (Sgd) K. V. Parish
Capt.

(Sgd) (?) Capt.
An officer of the Australian
Military Forces.

Subject: Laha Battle in Ambon Island

I landed at Hitrent before dawn on January 30, 1942 as a warrant officer leading a section of the second company. After landing, acting under the orders of superiors, accompanied by others in the section sought a guide, as we did not know the way to Laha. Accompanied by an old man and having ascertained our way we advanced towards Laha.

We arrived at Sowakodo that afternoon and after a short rest, we opened action. When we ceased action, we took up billets in Sowakodo.

We attacked several times without success, although suffering heavy casualties. While regretting over the loss of so many comrades, a shot fired from the enemy's trench mortar fell a coconut palm and a banana tree, and as I had no time to run away, I received a wound in the right shoulder. As it was my right arm, I retired to the rear for medical treatment in Sowakodo. Although I do not remember the exact date of the incident, but I believe it happened in the evening of February 1, 1942.

Laha was captured at dawn on February 3, 1942.

Since I was wounded, I did not participate in Laha battle, but remained with the rear unit.

The section under my command and others entered Laha on February 3, but I could not on account of my wound. Though I don't remember the exact date but I think it was in the evening of February 6 that I entered Laha, the ancient Tauri village, by a barge, and was billeted in a house, which was formerly used as a school. Unable to move freely on account of my wound, I did not go beyond the billeting area and thus could see only its neighborhood.

I first saw the allied prisoners at Sowakodo on my way to fetch meals at the army kitchen. At that time I did not know how these allied personnel come to be prisoners of the Japanese force. However about a month after that incident I discovered that they had surrendered.

The prisoners were detained in the school building at Sowakodo, which was situated on the other side of the temporary Japanese army kitchen. It was in the evening when I saw them and they were inside the cage.

Next time when I saw them, I believe it was in the morning of February 2 and there were about 3 or 9 escorted by Japanese soldiers.

On the same evening I saw another bunch of about ten also escorted by Japanese soldiers. As I was not able to take part in the night raid with others in the evening, I went to fetch my meal at the kitchen, when I saw some thirty allied prisoners again.

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Though I don't know the exact date, after we had finished our noon meal on or about the 6th, Commander of the Company, NAKAGAWA, arrived at Sowakodo with a party of Japanese troops of about a platoon strong (40) in two barges. He announced the disposal of the Allied prisoners, according to the order of the Landing party, and arrangements were made forthwith and the first execution took place after about an hour. Though uncertain, the prisoners were executed in a forest near Laha, located some 350 metres from the cages. The weapons used for execution were mostly Japanese swords, but bayonets also were used. The method was that each prisoner had his hands tied behind his back and was taken to the place of the execution and made to sit down directly in front of the prepared position, his neck slightly stretched downwards, but not blindfolded, and in this way they were executed. I saw the executions up to the 27th or the 28th man, but because I didn't see the rest I don't know what had happened to the remainder.

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HAMANISHI Shigeo
Warrant Officer

Document No. 5332

I, SX.16852 Capt Kinnish Vivian PARISH of ARMY HEADQUARTERS, MELBOURNE make oath and say:

1. I am an officer of the Australian Military Forces and am an English-Japanese interpreter.
2. Annexed hereto and marked "A" is a true copy of a statement in Japanese made by HAMANISHI Shigeo on 16th November, 1945, which I have checked against the original held by the Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees, Army HQ.
3. The original statement cannot be made available immediately as it is required for the trial of JAPANESE concerned in the massacre of Australian PW at LAHA, AMBOINA.

Sworn before me at MELBOURNE)
this 6th day of June, 1946)

(Sgd) K. V. Parish
Capt.

(Sgd) (?) Capt. -
An officer of the Australian
Military Forces.